

A Daily Publication of:



# Affirmation

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns

April 23, 2008

General Conference 2008 Fort Worth, TX

Issue #1

## Standing Outside of the Church

Anonymous

I stood outside the church on a cold, wet, windy February day in total shock. I had just been dismissed (polite word for being fired) because they said I "didn't fit their image for the person in this position." I had just been fired because they had found out I was a lesbian.

So call it fate, call it serendipity, call it the Holy Spirit when less than a month later I got an email from the Human Right's Campaign (HRC) calling ordained clergy to Washington, DC for a

press conference. I knew that even though I could end up on TV, Internet and in the HRC magazine I had to take the risk of my future employment and my clergy credentials to take a stand. No one should have to stand outside a church or workplace as I did unemployed solely because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

So I stood on another cold, windy day a few months later still unemployed on Capital Hill for the first time in my life. I was in awe. But I wasn't a tourist. I felt proud that I was there for a

purpose. So with the flag at half-mast behind me (because of the Virginia Tech killings) I stood together with 231 other clergy as we sang, prayed, listened and participated in a press conference to encourage the passing of the hate crimes bill and employment non discrimination bill.

Someday I hope again to stand behind the alter table and take the bread, bless it, break it and give it. In that moment, I will stand for all those who are there and also all those who aren't allowed or able to be there. I will

*(Standing...Continued on page 3)*

## We're Still Here .....

by Gary Shephard

Affirmation has been coming to General Conference for a long time. Unfortunately we don't have much to show for our efforts. In 2000 (the first GC I attended) those who strive for 'doctrinal purity' in the UMC declared that victory had decisively and decidedly been won by majority vote. We wouldn't as a church need to ever look at the "homosexual" issue again. In 2004 we were here with much the same result. The question of homosexuality had been decided, and the church would move on, issue settled, end of discussion, period.

The issue is not decided. Surprise! Majority vote won't change anyone's sexual orientation. Nor will it change the in-born gender identity of a transgender person. Trust us. We live the life every day. If there were an easier way to deal with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues, don't you think we'd have taken that route by now?

What words do we need to use? We didn't choose this. We didn't choose to be born lesbian or gay or bisexual or transgender. It's not a decision made after birth.

*(Still Here...Continued on page 3)*

### ITEMS OF NOTE

**Pastoral Care Support Line** starts Thu 4/24 (612-353-7445) thru end of GC  
**Transgender Press Conference** Thu 4/24 5:00 PM Intermodal Transportation Center  
**Breakfast** - Every day from 7:30 - 8:30 AM except Sun, First Christian Church.  
**Lunch** - Every day from 12:00 - 2:30 PM except Sun, First Christian Church.  
**MFSA Speaker series** starts Fri 4/25 1:15 - 2:00 PM except Sunday, First Christian Church

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### Mission Statement

As an independent voice of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people, Affirmation radically reclaims the compassionate and transforming gospel of Jesus Christ by relentlessly pursuing full inclusion in the Church as we journey with the Spirit in creating God's beloved community.

Adopted January 2005

\* Note: substitute the symbol "@" for the letters "\_at\_" in the email addresses.



## I Don't Wanna Talk About It

by Rev. Dr. Jeanne Knepper

*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.*

*George Santayana*

These words from George Santayana seem especially relevant as talk circulates of the possibility of an early decision that this 2008 General Conference will not take up any petitions concerning the subject of homosexuality. It is argued that the subjects have been discussed enough, that the church has made up its mind, and that further discussion only impedes the real work of the church.

We would argue that delegates who find themselves persuaded by these arguments should think about the last time that the General Conference considered a request to curtail discussion of or action upon petitions of a controversial nature, in 1836.

In 1836, the Methodist Episcopal Church contained within it profound disagreement concerning the role of the church in the national controversy over slavery. That year, the bishops of the Church took up the topic of abolitionism in their Pastoral Address. They advised,

*... we have been very much agitated in some portions of our work, with the very excitable subject of what has been called abolitionism. ... From every view of the subject which we have been able to take, and from the most calm and dispassionate survey of the whole ground, we have come to the solemn conviction, that the only safe, Scriptural and prudent way for us both as ministers and as people, to take, is wholly to*

*refrain from this agitating subject, ... as alike destructive to the peace of the Church, and to the happiness of the slave himself.* [Lewis Curtis, editor, *General Conferences, 1792-1896*, published by the Western Methodist Book concern, 1900, page 281]

The bishops then proceeded to enforce their solemn conviction at the annual conferences, refusing to hear conference committee reports on slavery or to hear reports or motions on slavery. The Methodist Episcopal history of the General Conferences written in 1900, summed up the effects of this policy thus:

*... the efforts of the bishops to stop agitation by assuming powers which were never committed to them, only added fuel to the fire, until it set the whole Church ablaze.* [ibid., page 282.]

It is so tempting, for those who hold power and yet cannot convince others to see it their way, to declare, "That's it! We're not going to talk about this any more!" From the other side, there is no more heart breaking message than to be told, "Our minds are made up. We will no longer listen to anything you have to say on this subject."

To do this is to close ourselves to the working of God's Spirit among us, and is the sign of a church that has decided to value a temporary semblance of peace more highly than an honest and respectful preservation of the common forum where all may bring their concerns. These choices led directly to the schism of 1844. They did not make for peace in 1836, and they will not make for peace and health in the church in 2008.



*(Still Here...Continued from page 1)*

The truth is we're born this way. If that's the language you want to use, God created us this way. (And, while we're at it, we're not saying God made any mistakes.)

Why do so many people insist we're evil and destined for Hell unless we repent and "go straight"? Wouldn't that be a sin, living a lie, pretending to be something we're not?

*"Open hearts, open minds, open doors? If only I live long enough to see it."*

So here we are again. Telling the truth about ourselves to ears that refuse to hear, and eyes that refuse to see, and hearts and minds that refuse to open. Open hearts, open minds, open doors?

*(Standing...Continued from page 1)*

stand and remember Jesus but also Virginia Tech, Matthew Shepard and standing outside the church on that cold February day. I will stand remembering when I stood on the Capital grounds because in both places my standing proclaimed resurrection and the promise this table offers for an end to hate and discrimination and the full inclusion of all people in the church in both polity and practice.

I stood shocked. I stood proud. I hope to stand again at the table. But wherever and whenever I can I will continue to stand.

If only I live long enough to see it.

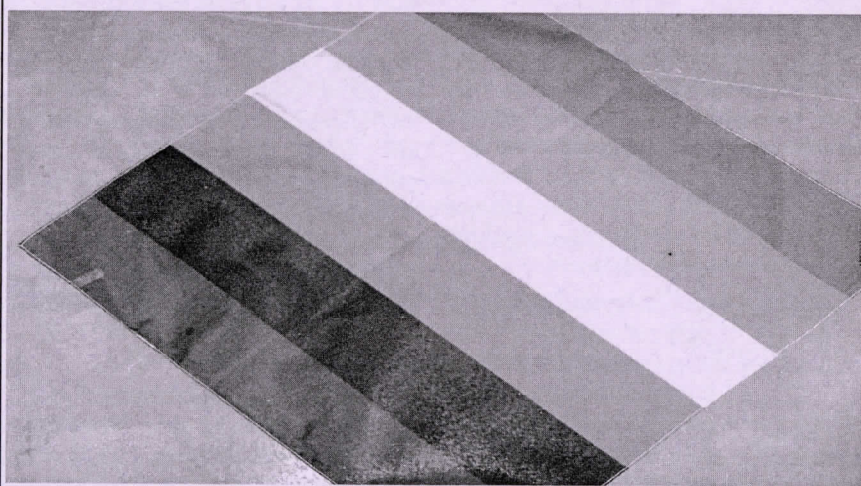
*"I know the effort we put forth here is necessary to make sure you don't forget we exist."*

I know the effort we put forth here is worth it because the issue is not settled. I know the effort we put forth here is necessary to make sure you don't forget we exist. There are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children being born into the church, being baptized every Sunday, or working on their confirmation class materials. There are youth in our UMYF

wondering if they're going to Hell because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, frightened by the words in the Bible they got at confirmation.

Even if I were not a 38 year United Methodist (I got here a little late, having started out as a United Presbyterian,) I'd still see a need for this and all churches to embrace those we currently label lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. Discrimination and violence against us is rooted in the Bible even among the un-churched. Even if we end the discrimination against us in our church, we'll know no rest until it's ended in all denominations and eventually society as a whole.

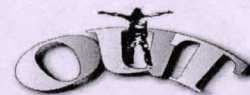
We're still here. And we always will be.



It's a bird! It's a plane! It's a test pattern!

Or is this just a black and white photo of those colorful "OUTies"... the people who handed this newsletter to you were wearing? Stay tuned!





# Avoiding Sexuality Issue Is Not True Peace

A UMNS Commentary reprinted by permission of UMNS

by Steven E. Webster

Many voices from across The United Methodist Church are suggesting there is no way forward in the 36-year-long dialogue about the role and status of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in the church. Declaring an impasse, these voices call for an end to this dialogue in the name of peace and unity.

Forty-five years ago, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote a now-famous letter from a jail cell in Birmingham, Ala., to a group of white clergy (including two Methodist bishops) who--in the name of "unity" and "peace"--had publicly called on King and his allies to cease their disturbing nonviolent protests against racial segregation.

King wrote that the "great stumbling block" in the African-American struggle for equality was not blatant bigotry, "but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice, who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice."

I embrace our Wesleyan Christian vision of "making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" and applaud the General Conference for seeking to build unity around four focus areas: 1) developing principled Christian leaders for the church and the world; 2) reaching new people in new places by starting new congregations and renewing existing ones; 3) engaging in ministry with the poor; and 4) stamping out killer diseases by improving health globally.

Yet we undercut these same goals when we continue to: 1) reject the gifts and graces of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons and their allies; 2) turn off a younger generation that views the

Christian faith as "anti-homosexual;" 3) push LGBT youth into poverty and homelessness as families reject them because church and society stigmatizes LGBT persons; and 4) fail to address the role that ignorance and stigmatization of homosexuality (and other sexualities) play in the global AIDS epidemic.

The United Methodist Church cannot enjoy true peace and unity while it engages in injustice and spiritual violence against some of its members. Biblical peace does not refer to the apparent absence of conflict, and still less to the suppression of dialogue. In the Bible, "peace" ("shalom" in Hebrew) is a holistic concept that includes justice and total well-being.

To fail to address the issue of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the church now would leave in place the status quo in church law that includes Judicial Council Decision 1032, which normalizes the exclusion of LGBT persons from membership in the church. Decision 1032 has never yet been the subject of discussion at a General Conference and runs counter to a (non-binding) plea in our Social Principles that "we implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends."

Even if lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are allowed to attend or join the membership of The United Methodist Church, Decision 1032 further legitimates the widespread practice of "shunning" such persons as unworthy to serve in any of the ministries of the local church. This is spiritual violence, the misuse of religious authority to demean and diminish LGBT Christians.

I know LGBT persons who have been denied the opportunity to serve in the church as leaders of adult education classes, choir members, committee members, or readers of Scripture in worship. It

is not unheard of for committed same-gender couples to be denied baptism for their babies and gay youth to be shunned from youth groups in The United Methodist Church.

These acts, justified by labeling LGBT people as "unrepentant sinners" inferior to all the "repentant sinners" in the church, are acts of spiritual violence, harming the souls of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. It is tragic that being from a devout Christian family has been identified as a risk factor for suicide among LGBT youths.

Some have described the church's long dialogue over these issues as "a thorn in the flesh." Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 that he endured a painful "thorn in the flesh" that would not leave him even though he pleaded with God to remove it. God's answer to Paul applies to us: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."

We feel weary and weakened by this long dialogue over homosexuality, a dialogue in which I have actively participated in many ways these past 36 years. The faith that sustains me is that God intends to perfect us through these trials, and we, the people of The United Methodist Church, look forward to a real peace which is, in King's words, the presence of justice and not merely the absence of tension.

*Steven Webster is chair of the church council of University United Methodist Church in Madison, Wis., and had attended the 2000 and 2004 General Conferences as a volunteer with Soulforce, an organization that describes itself as working for freedom for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people from religious and political oppression. He legally married Jim Dietrich, his partner of 27 years, in a civil ceremony in Toronto in 2006.*